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SUBJECT: CORRECTED COPY: KAZAKHSTAN: LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEMOLISHES
HARE KRISHNA HOMES DESPITE ONGOING NEGOTIATIONS

REF: A. 06 ASTANA 651, B. 06 ASTANA 668, C. 06 ASTANA 903

[1](#)D. ASTANA 232, E. ASTANA 1371

ASTANA 00001722 001.2 OF 002

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Early on June 15, Karasai district officials demolished an additional 12 homes at the Hare Krishna commune outside of Almaty. As they did during the November 2006 demolitions, the police forced residents out of their homes while crews threw their possessions outside and demolished the houses with hand tools and excavators. There were no arrests or incidents of violence. Karasai district officials carried out the long-threatened evictions despite Government of Kazakhstan assurances that the dispute would be resolved peacefully, through negotiations. End summary.

LOCAL OFFICIALS DEMOLISH 12 MORE HOUSES...

[1](#)2. (SBU) Late on June 14, Hare Krishna representatives reported that they received a tip that Karasai district officials were organizing a demolition crew to come to the Hare Krishna commune the following morning. Unlike previous false warnings (Ref E), the tip proved accurate. On June 15, Karasai district officials led a team of local hired laborers to demolish 12 additional homes at the commune outside of Almaty. Local officials acted pursuant to a court order calling for the eviction of the residents. According to Hare Krishna representatives and Andrey Grishin, a reporter for the Kazakhstan International Human Rights Bureau, the demolition crew arrived at 5 a.m. with approximately 100 police officers. Karasai district officials, aided by their police escorts, forced residents from their homes, and the demolition crews began throwing possessions outside and tearing the structures apart with hand tools. The demolition crews then used excavators to knock down the walls, in the process damaging some adjacent buildings not slated for demolition.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Hare Krishna representatives said that the demolition crews ignored the pleas of residents to spare their houses. In contrast to the previous demolitions on November 21, 2006 (Ref A), the Hare Krishnas reported no arrests or violence arising out of the demolitions. The demolition crews did not destroy the large house that the Krishnas use as their temple, located on a separate plot of land, though they fear this destruction could come at any time given the May 8 Supreme Court ruling clearing the way for authorities to confiscate that land (Ref E). According to the Hare Krishnas, they

have about a dozen cottages remaining, plus the large house and a cowshed.

14. (SBU) The Hare Krishnas said that a reporter from Vremya newspaper witnessed the demolitions, along with Grishin. Grishin said that local authorities were less aggressive with the journalists this time around, though village akim Bagdad Akhmetayev tried to confiscate the camera phone of one resident when the resident filmed him holding a sledgehammer and participating in the demolition. Akhmetayev relented when journalists approached.

...DESPITE ASTANA'S PLEDGE TO NEGOTIATE

15. (SBU) Karasai district officials proceeded with the demolitions despite public and private assurances by Government of Kazakhstan officials that the long-running dispute would be resolved through negotiations. As reported in Ref E, Vice Chairman of the Religious Issues Committee Amanbek Mukhashov, Human Rights Ombudsman Bolat Baykadamov, deputy head of the Presidential Administration Maulen Ashimbayev, and chairman of the Religious Issues Committee in the Ministry of Justice Yeraly Tugzhanov previously stated both privately and publicly that Kazakhstan would resolve the conflict through negotiations and that the Government of Kazakhstan was ready to provide another piece of land in Almaty for construction of a new Hare Krishna temple.

16. (SBU) Tugzhanov previously told Hare Krishna representatives that he was working with Almaty city officials to find a new piece of land for the Hare Krishnas. However, Krishna representatives questioned the sincerity of the government's interest in finding an acceptable solution. On May 25 and 30, Hare Krishna representatives said they visited plots of land offered by local officials in the Ilisky and Talgar districts in Almaty oblast, but the land plots were very small, were located over 100 km away from the city, did not have electricity or water, and were not suitable for

ASTANA 00001722 002.2 OF 002

agricultural uses. The Hare Krishnas rejected the land plots, and stated in a May 30 press release that this solution "amounts only to rubbing the proposed salty earth into the wounds of a hard-hit religious minority."

GOVERNMENT BEGINS DAMAGE CONTROL

17. (SBU) The Hare Krishnas continue to wage a public relations campaign to bring attention to the latest round of demolitions, issuing press releases and posting photographs of the destruction on their website (<http://www.kazakhkrishna.com/ru-fotoarchive/>). The Kazakhstan International Bureau of Human Rights, Almaty Helsinki Committee, and the Institute on Religion and Public Policy have already condemned the government's actions.

18. (SBU) On June 16, Tugzhanov stated during a news conference in Astana that the demolitions were legal and were based on court rulings that the Hare Krishnas did not have valid ownership of the land. He said that the Hare Krishnas had been notified many times of the pending court executions, and could have prevented this "scandalous" situation if they had obeyed earlier court orders. Tugzhanov also stated that no political or religious meaning should be attached to the demolitions, as the issue was purely an economic dispute between citizens of Kazakhstan and the local government.

19. (SBU) OSCE Human Dimension Officer Eugenia Benigni told us that Tugzhanov stated to her on June 18 that the government has tried to resolve the situation by offering new plots of land but the Hare Krishnas have refused several offers. He defended the quality of the land plots that were offered to the Hare Krishnas, and said the Hare Krishnas were being unreasonable. He stated that it was possible there would be more offers, but said that relations between the parties were very tense.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) Comment: Once again, aggressive local authorities have acted in contradiction to the stated intentions of officials in Astana, signaling a lack of real political will in Astana to reach an acceptable negotiated settlement for the Hare Krishnas. We expect that Kazakhstani officials will adhere to Tugzhanov's line that the demolitions were legal and were justified by the Hare Krishnas' refusal to accept "reasonable" offers of new land. The government's conduct demonstrates that the Hare Krishnas have very little hope for a fair resolution to their dispute. End comment.

ORDWAY